The book cover features a dark, marbled pattern with swirling, organic shapes in shades of black, grey, and white. A white rectangular label is pasted in the center, and another white rectangular label is pasted in the lower-left corner.

JAQUES.  
DRIFTING SOIL..

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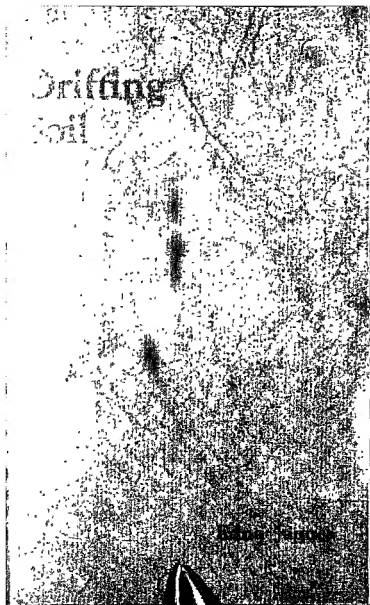
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# Drifting Soil



EDNA JAQUES

*Edna Jaques*

Photo: Mr. and Mrs. Cyril Jessop  
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# Drifting Soil

*By Edna Jaques*

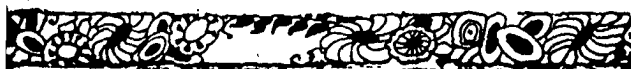
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*DEDICATED TO MY MOTHER*

*"She kept her kindly ways somehow,  
With peace, like perfume, on her brow;  
She kept her faith in human good,  
Her clean belief in womanhood.  
She sowed her love with lavish hand  
In every corner of the land."*



# Drifting Soil

## THIS CANADA

How could I bound it with one little page  
Who holds such riches for a heritage?  
How could I list with one rude, stumbling pen  
A new world open to the eyes of men,  
Or talk in little words of her at all  
Who holds me captive in her mighty thrall?

Her vast dominion sweeps from sea to sea,  
Yet little gardens hold the heart of me,  
Small streets with houses set in tidy rows,  
Patches of ground where clump of lilac grows.  
And clean white clothes upon a line to dry,  
Making dear homely pictures on the sky.

How could I sing of mountains capped with snow,  
Of vast unfathomed valleys far below,  
Or plains that sweep a thousand endless miles  
With tiny plots of ground where summer smiles.  
A kitchen garden with its black rich loam,  
And mothers calling little children home.

How could I voice such dear eternal things  
As mating birds and hurrying eager wings;  
Mothers who fold their thin old hands to pray;  
That last white star who waits to greet the day;  
Hunger and thirst, supper and new baked bread;  
Sorrow so deep it can't be comforted?



And yet as long as this warm heart shall beat  
Her voice will sing of dawn above the wheat;  
Of crumbling furrows laid in steaming rows,  
Dear homely fields where someone reaps and sows,  
And kindly folk to love her budding flowers—  
This virgin land . . . this Canada of ours.

## KINDLY EYES

*(To My Mother)*

She looked at life with kindly eyes—  
She never seemed to realize  
She bore the hardest kind of care;  
She never howled and tore her hair  
Or called down curses on her spouse,  
Who made a workshop of the house.

She went through trials that would down  
The toughest man in all the town,  
She bore the brunt of every blow  
And didn't let the neighbors know;  
She walked with poverty and toil,  
With trust that life could never spoil.

She kept her kindly ways somehow  
With peace like perfume on her brow,  
She kept her faith in human good,  
Her clean belief in womanhood;  
She sowed her love with lavish hand  
In every corner of the land.

She had no special kind of creed  
But folks went to her in their need:



She never turned a soul away  
Without some comfort for their day;  
She knew a heart could sink so low  
To drink the bitter dregs of woe.

She taught us by her life serene  
What faith and hope and love could mean,  
The common claims of brotherhood  
That riches are not always good;  
She dwelt among us calm and wise  
And looked at life with kindly eyes.

### A WORKING MOTHER'S PRAYER

God, keep her safe; she is so small to leave  
In empty rooms to fret and watch and grieve  
With only make-believe and dolls to play.  
It is too cold to let her out today  
And I have need to earn our daily bread  
And hold my job, that we may still be fed.

Oh, give Thine angels charge—a little one,  
Who left us here before her play was done,  
She might be glad to come to earth once more  
And play with blocks upon a sunny floor  
And dress her dolls and play her favorite game,  
And keep her company until I came.

And when it's warm and she can play outside  
Let them go out along the pavement wide,  
Down to the park to swing and feed the swan  
And hunt for four-leaf clover on the lawn.  
And help her watch at corners of the street—  
Those buses are so swift for little feet.



I shall not mind the hours if I know  
Someone is there wherever she might go,  
Holding their hands before her childish face,  
Walking with her along a dangerous place.  
And when I turn the corner may I see  
Her watching there upon the steps for me.

### THE SETTLER'S CAR

A team of horses and a spotted cow,  
A patched-up wagon and a painted sleigh,  
A set of double harness and a plow,  
Some oat sheaves and a pile of prairie hay,  
And yet with this they dared the vast unknown—  
Facing the frontier world, with faith alone.

They have a dozen happy, speckled hens,  
A pig or two who grunted in the back,  
A few old turkeys in some slatted pens,  
Some seed potatoes in a mended sack,  
An Airedale dog whose foot was always lame,  
A bright new lantern hanging on a hame.

Back in a corner sitting on some hay  
A woman quickly patched an over-all,  
Glancing across to where a baby lay  
In a rude manger nailed against the wall,  
A worn old ring upon her calloused hand—  
This sturdy-limbed Madonna of the land.

Thus do they pass, the Vikings of the race,  
Seeking new trails, new lands to claim and hold,  
Faith like a torch, to shine upon their face,  
Making a jest of loneliness and cold.  
God grant them peace upon their threshold far,  
The lights of home to hold them like a star!



## DRYING WOOD

I love the smell of drying wood,  
Its fragrance is so clean and good.  
I think of little kitchens warm,  
Their windows battened from the storm.  
And safe wee homes against the snow  
With cheerful firesides aglow.

I think of driftwood, clean and high,  
Piled up in little rows to dry.  
The smell of cedar on the air,  
By shining beaches warm and bare.  
Strange driftwood of a hundred lands  
Picked up by little children's hands.

I think of tables gladly spread  
With flaky loaves of home-made bread,  
Of golden honey in a pot  
And steaming suppers rich and hot,  
With lamplight yellow as the sun  
And happiness when day is done.

I think of sprouted wheat and soil,  
Of wide brown fields where horses toil,  
Of pastures green with quiet trees,  
And little children on their knees—  
Life's common things are sweet and good  
Like drifting smoke and drying wood.

## MY NEIGHBOR

I have a little neighbor friend,  
Her house is oh, so snug and small,  
You wouldn't think such tiny rooms  
Could shelter anyone at all!



And yet her rosy clear-eyed sons  
Find peace and love within its doors  
And little girls with sunny hair  
Play quietly about the floors.

She never speaks of pride or greed  
But dwells in singing ways apart;  
If grief or envy touches her  
She keeps it hidden in her heart.  
She makes the best of what she has  
And always finds enough to spare;  
If someone comes at dinner time  
He finds a gracious welcome there.

There's flowers on the window sill  
And stiff white curtains primly set;  
There's laughter and a quiet peace,  
A love that mocks at toil and fret.  
The world goes by with anxious step,  
She rests secure in quiet right,  
And in the dark her windows shine  
Like stars against the friendly night.

### WORSHIP

We had no temples grand  
Or altars there,  
Where we could worship God  
In stately prayer.

Only a wind-swept waste  
Of countryside,  
Old barns and hay-stacks  
Huddled side by side.







A bunch of cattle in a  
Rude corral,  
A few wind-tattered willows  
By the well.

And yet somehow at eventide  
We found  
God's footsteps printed  
On that lonely ground.

## MY KITCHEN WINDOW

My kitchen window is above the sink  
With dotted curtains looped in tiny folds,  
A frame for mountains and a bit of sea  
And all day long it glows and shines and holds  
A hundred pictures for my heart's delight—  
People who hurry by . . . and stars at night!

What matters if my work is drab and dull  
When I can lift my eyes from pots and pans  
And see a mountain etched against the sky,  
A fleet of clouds like shining caravans  
Setting their course to harbors dim and far  
In some vast heaven where the blessed are.

I don't mind making pies and loaves of bread  
If I can look out from my window high  
And see a little girl with flying hair  
Poised on a scooter as she dashes by—  
Such breathless sunny joy her heart must know  
Seems leaven for a whole wide world of woe.



So my small window with its curtains prim  
Brings all the world knocking at my heart,  
A mother passing by, a priest, a child,  
Makes me in tiny rooms a living part  
Of all this glad good earth, and makes me kin  
Of all the glory that has ever been.

### A FARMER'S WIFE

*(In the drought area)*

The crop has failed again, the wind and sun  
Dried out the stubble first, then one by one  
The strips of summerfallow, seered with heat  
Crunched, like old fallen leaves, our lovely wheat  
The garden is a dreary, blighted waste,  
The very air is gritty to my taste.

And now I ask, O Lord, a mother's prayer!  
Help me to know these fields so brown and bare  
Are not of Thee, that all this stricken land  
Is not because of Thine avenging hand,  
But ours the fault; we did not farm it right  
And now it answers us with wind and blight.

I don't know how we'll face another year—  
Help us somehow to know that you are near.  
The children need so many things, and I—  
I don't mind much, but oh, I'd love to buy  
A nice new dress, a soft blue silk that clings.  
O God, forgive me for such trivial things!

I know we'll manage somehow, but today  
It is all dark, I cannot see the way;



The months loom up with all their snow and cold.  
Oh, give us something, Lord, some faith to hold,  
Something that we can count on, look ahead  
Above these stricken fields so brown and dead.

And even as I wait before Thy throne  
New strength flows in, and I am not alone;  
This hour with Thee has brought me strength and grace.  
I shall go on with courage now to face  
Whatever comes, the children will be fed:  
Give us each day, O God, our daily bread!

## THE SECRET OF HAPPINESS

To carry little places in your heart,  
An old back-yard, a purple lilac hedge,  
The noiseless flight of birds across the sky,  
Small potted plants upon a window ledge.

A new calf hidden in the bush somewhere,  
Soft as old silk, its shiny new-born fur,  
The mother pasturing near with anxious face  
Keeps close and talks with little sounds to her.

A mother hen who steals her nest away  
Under the willows, where the ground is hard;  
Fulfills her time and brings her feathered young  
With clucking pride back to the stable yard.

A deep old well we hadn't used for years,  
We lift the lid and in the darkness see,  
Beneath the earth, its water cool and sweet  
Reflecting back its quiet depths to me.



A winter sunrise with its tongues of flame,  
Vast searchlights seeking out the way of earth,  
A wan young mother's shining lifted face  
Still white with anguish for her baby's birth.  
Old as the seas, and yet tomorrow's dawn  
Holds nothing newer than these time-worn things.  
Love for your mate and home and little feet,  
And hushed still evenings when a robin sings.

### THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS

Not the vast God of continents and seas,  
The Lord of thunder—awful in His might,  
Who rides upon the lightning and the wind  
Smiting the first-born in the shuddering night.  
But He who fashions in his tender hands  
The small white wings that bear a thistle seed,  
Who tunes the mourning pigeon's wistful note,  
Colors the flaming petals of a weed.  
The God who heals the broken bark of trees,  
Who tints the scarlet of the robin's breast,  
Curls the wee tendrils of a climbing rose,  
Fashions the swaying cradle of a nest.  
This is the God we need, who understands  
The small importance of a loaf of bread,  
Who hears the stumbling prayer of homeless men  
And sends them from his Presence, comforted.  
O God of common folk, help us to know  
The heart that fashions all these tender things  
Is mindful of His own, and brings us safe  
Into the harbour of His sheltering!



## MIRACLES

I need no proof of miracles divine  
To satisfy this doubting soul of mine,  
When I can see a rainbow softly bent—  
The blessed witness of the Covenant.

I need no miracle of fish and bread  
No stumbling Lazarus risen from the dead,  
While here beside my house the roses lean  
And tiny columbines are veined with green.

I need no Calvary . . . no upper room,  
No sudden rending of the garden tomb,  
When I can see at any summer hour  
The fourfold mystery of seed and flower.

Ah, holden eye that asketh proof of God  
When every living twig is Aaron's rod,  
Who will not see before his very face  
The Majesty that set the stars in place!

## MARTHA

O Martha, now you toil with brush and broom  
To chase the cobwebs from this sunny room.

The upper hall, the vestibule, the stair  
(I know that dust just seems to gather there).

And so you follow it with battle grim  
Hunting it out from corners dark and dim.

Triumph at last, and all the places clean  
The hall and stairs and everything between.

But Martha, did you know that while you swept  
A lonely child sat in the house and wept.





And in the apple tree beside the lane  
That same old pair of robins sang again.

And did you miss among the cobwebs there  
The feel of spring that quivered everywhere.

And such a paltry bargain, thus to trade  
A scrubbed old kitchen for a sea of jade.

A tidy attic for a row of pinks  
And golden daffodils for polished sinks.

Why earth and heaven wait upon you there  
Never did Spring a finer garment wear.

And oh the salty wind across the seas,  
White gulls above the cliff . . . and days like these

### BEGGARS

And so they find my door  
With little prayers,  
Trying to sell their bits  
Of shoddy wares.

Timid old faded eyes  
That beg and plead,  
Even before they speak  
To voice their need.

And so I buy their pins  
And home-made lace  
(I never could resist  
A tired face).



Or turn a feeble, shabby  
Soul away—  
My last dime bought a bunch  
Of cress today.

But for Thy mercy, Lord,  
Thy boundless store,  
I, too, might peddle pins  
From door to door.

### AN OLD SOLDIER DIES DRUNK

O God, be good to him when he goes in!  
(I know he died in drunkenness and sin.)  
But have the portals wide as he goes by,  
It's such a fearful lonely thing to die  
Without some hand to bid us on our way—  
And he went out, alone, to Thee . . . today!

Have some old soldier there to watch and wait  
When he goes stumbling in at heaven's gate.  
And tell the others not to notice him—  
His poor scarred face, his mouth so set and grim.  
War made such sores, they seemed to burn and heal,  
Deep hidden wounds that only Death could heal.

Broken in body . . . all his youth poured out  
In bitter draughts to slake war's greedy thirst,  
Only a boy with shining eager eyes,  
(So many gay young lads went out at first).  
And so war drained him, burnt his youth away,  
Left just the husk . . . that went to Thee today!

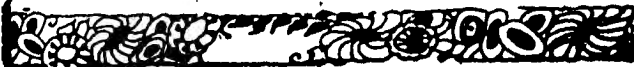


And all the years between have been so hard,  
Unsettled . . . bitter . . . out of work and ill;  
Nothing that really mattered to him now,  
No golden dreams ahead—no niche to fill.  
Only a rusted gun . . . a broken sword,  
And now we ask for him—Thy mercy, Lord!

### THINGS HE LOVED

Such homely simple things the Master taught,  
Plain common rules of sturdy human worth,  
He spoke of neighbors at the close of day,  
Of little children cradled by the hearth;  
Housework, and women at their spinning wheel,  
Old tired farmers at their evening meal.  
He loved old battered ships and glistening spray,  
Warm beaches on a sunny afternoon;  
Lilies among the grass, and rugged hills  
(Dear homely hills he was to leave so soon);  
Sowers who plodded down the fields of spring,  
Old muzzled oxen at the harvesting.  
He loved the wedding-feast, the gay rich warmth  
Of crimson wine and laughter—tinted song,  
The throb of harps, the lilt of happy talk,  
Larks in the pasture fields the sweet day long;  
The synagogues where old men knelt to pray  
And read their prophecies at close of day.  
He loved old wood, the smell of cedar boughs,  
The feel of fir, the sheen of golden oak;  
Loved the dear crooked streets of Nazareth,  
The kindly simple ways of common folk;  
All these warm homely things He held so dear,  
Those golden tinted years . . . when He was here.





## LITTLE SONGS

And from the lute-strings of my crowded days  
I shall bring psalms of life and hymns of praise.

When I can see above a batch of bread  
A lonely settler on his far homestead.

Or by the window in a cushioned chair  
A dear old mother rocking softly there.

Or hear a cow-bell in the friendly dark;  
Dawn on the wheat . . . and one brown meadow-lark.

Or see the branches of the-golden-rod  
In an old coulee lighting lamps for God.

A row of sparrows on the water-trough  
(The smallest gust of wind would blow them off).

Or see the glory on a woman's face,  
Making the best of some old shabby place.

do not need earth's grander symphonies,  
When I have quiet rooms . . . and songs like these.